
HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD MASTER PLAN REVIEW

Property Address:	North Capitol/Michigan Avenue, NW	X	Agenda
Landmark/District:	McMillan Reservoir		Consent Calendar
		X	Master Plan
Meeting Date:	April 4, 2013	X	Alteration
Staff Reviewer:	Steve Callcott	X	New Construction
		X	Demolition

Vision McMillan Partners (VMP) returns to the Board with revisions to a draft master plan and design guidelines for the McMillan Park Reservoir sand filtration site. VMP is represented by architect/master planner Matthew Bell (Perkins Eastman), preservation consultant EHT Traceries (Emily Eig), landscape architects Nelson Byrd Woltz (Warren Byrd), and project manager Anne Corbett. The team also includes the development partners Trammell Crow Company, Jair Lynch Development Partners and EYA. Bowman Consulting and Robert Sillman Associates (Kirk Mettam) have also been advising the team regarding the site's existing structural conditions.

Previous Review

The Board reviewed an earlier version of the master plan in July and September 2012. While the members expressed their appreciation for the tremendous amount of thought and effort put into the plan and their general belief that the plan was moving in the right direction, a number of concerns for further consideration were suggested. The comments fell into three general categories:

- The plan was trying to relate too closely to the many disparate conditions around it, rather than reinforcing and recreating a unique place that is specific to the character of McMillan and distinct from what is surrounding it;
- The north and south edge conditions and the loss of the site's topographical plinth (as well as the incomplete nature of the recreated Olmsted walk and loss of corner entrances), were specifically cited as problematic as part of the loss of the distinctiveness of the site;
- The design guidelines were thought to be too generic and not strong enough in stating what was important to preserve; it was requested that the guidelines be revised to be more specific in representing the characteristics of the site.

Revised Proposal

VMP was prepared to present a response to the Board's comments late last year when it was announced by Mayor Gray that a portion of the McMillan site would be needed as part of an effort to address the surface flooding and sewer backups in the Bloomingdale and LeDroit Park neighborhoods. As the HPRB reviewed on March 28th, the District of Columbia Water and Sewer Authority (DC Water) is seeking a raze application for two below-grade sand

filtration cells as part of its construction of a storm water and sewer overflow tunnel within First Street. The DC Water proposal has resulted in the need for substantial changes to the master plan, reflected in the current submission.

The biggest change is the relocation of the proposed park, now occupying the entire southern section of the site. The revision is a result of several factors, including the inability to build immediately around or on top of the tunnel entrance, the Board's concerns about the loss of the topography of the site, and the community's expressed desire for a larger park. The plans include preservation or reconstruction of one of the cells (#28) for incorporation into the park, a partially above-grade community center, water features, and a cut in the berm facing North Capitol Street to provide a civic-scaled, accessible entrance. As before, the above-grade structures in the south maintenance corridor would be retained and also incorporated into the park, and the corner stairs and Olmsted walk would be recreated.

The middle section has been reprogrammed with four-story townhouses, a 75-110' tall building with a ground-level grocery store with apartments above, and an apartment and/or medical office building that would be up to 110' tall. The buildings would be organized around a mid-block north-south road, and two new east-west roads. The buildings would extend closer to North Capitol Street than previously presented within the footprint of the original Olmsted walk. Instead, the applicants are looking to perhaps evoke the Olmsted walk within the area of the public sidewalk.

The northern section of the site is largely unchanged from when previously presented. It would include two medical office buildings, up to 110-130' in height, organized around a garden courtyard facing Michigan Avenue. Cell 14 at the northeast corner of the site would be retained. The entire width of the cell would be preserved, whereas the previous plan called for some encroachment on the cell by one of the office buildings. The curvilinear Olmsted walk would be recreated at the north edge of the site.

Revised Design Guidelines

The revised guidelines are organized around five basic objectives: preserving the site as distinct and cohesive, preserving and celebrating its significance, preserving and adapting its historic resources, creating a cohesive community that connects to the surrounding neighborhoods, and designing landscapes and buildings that reinforce McMillan's unique sense of place. Architectural cohesion guidelines have been developed as an appendix, which seek to outline ways for the new construction to complement (but not mimic) the site's historic resources through appropriate ratios of masonry-glass, suggests a range of materials and colors, and encourages retention or evocation of the site's topographical plinth.

Evaluation

The retention of the topography at the southern end of the site is a substantial improvement in retaining one of McMillan's most character-defining features. The relocation of the park to this area not only preserves the edge and distinguishes it from what is around it but, with ongoing development of the park design, could be far more successful in opening the site up and achieving connectivity with the surrounding communities. No longer internal to

McMillan, the park could serve as a common space equally shared by all the abutting neighborhoods. The revised park location and plan has the added benefit of allowing the recreation of the Olmsted walk at its highest elevation, which affords the best views south to the monuments and downtown.

No longer immediately opposite the existing houses on Channing Street, the relocation of the townhouses to the other side of the park may provide some greater flexibility in their design. The two drawbacks to the site plan in the middle section are the introduction of a second east-west road and the loss of setback along North Capitol Street that had allowed the recreation of the Olmsted walk. The road that runs through the center of the townhouse development should be evaluated as to whether the curb cuts to First Street and North Capitol could be eliminated and the road made internal to the site. Similarly, additional study and consultation with DDOT will be needed to ensure that the Olmsted walk in this area doesn't devolve into a standard public sidewalk but instead can provide a linkage between the north and south sections of the site that is evocative of its original character.

In the north section, the full retention of cell 14 is an obvious preservation improvement over the previous plan. The only other substantive change has been the extension of the road being inserted in the north maintenance corridor through to First Street (in the previous plan, the road did not connect and circled back to North Capitol Street). The resulting change in grade between the service court (165') and First Street (174') will require retaining walls and ramps to be constructed on either side of at least three of the service court sand binds. The change in grade relative to these structures will most certainly have an adverse visual effect on the structures themselves and their relationship with the other structures on the corridor. The HPO has asked that this be rendered so that the visual impact could be evaluated.

The design guidelines have been simplified and made more specific to the goal of encouraging that development relate to and reflect the character of the site. Without being overly restrictive, the architectural cohesion guidelines provide reasonable perimeters for ensuring there be some relationship between the disparate buildings types proposed.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board:

- *Find the revised park placement and the retention/recreation of the property's southern topographical edge to be significant improvements in retaining the character of the site;*
- *Ask the applicants to continue studying how the Olmsted perimeter walk could be evoked in those areas where buildings will intrude on its original footprint, and evaluate whether curb cuts can be further reduced;*
- *Ask the applicants provide renderings that show the impact of the ramps/retaining walls proposed for the north maintenance corridor, and explore alternatives that would minimize or eliminate physical and visual impacts on the above-grade structures.*
- *Not take any formal action on the design guidelines, but use them as reference in the review of future construction.*